

FROM HOLOCAUST MEMORY TO HOLOCAUST LOGIC: LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTIONS OF LEGITIMIZED VIO- LENCE IN ISRAELI POLITICAL RHETORIC

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how wartime political speech by senior Israeli officials from October to December 2023 constructs authority and normalizes civilian harm in the Palestinian context. We analyze a curated database of public statements using mixed methods to understand how linguistic patterns legitimize violence during armed conflict. Quantitative analysis reveals frequent co-occurrence of rhetorical themes including collective punishment, civilian harm, genocidal intent, and dehumanization across multiple speakers. Qualitative discourse analysis identifies specific linguistic strategies: performative declarations of unrestrained force, metaphysical binaries framing the conflict in civilizational terms, and totalizing claims of civilian culpability. These patterns demonstrate how political rhetoric normalizes exceptional measures by projecting moral certainty and strategic inevitability. Methodological triangulation combining frequency counts with close textual analysis ensures analytic credibility, while acknowledging limitations in translation fidelity and curation dependence. The findings contribute to early-warning frameworks for monitoring dangerous speech and have implications for accountability mechanisms in conflict settings.

1 INTRODUCTION

This study examines linguistic patterns in political rhetoric during armed conflict, focusing on statements by senior Israeli officials from October to December 2023. The analysis investigates how language constructs authority and normalizes measures affecting civilian populations in the Palestinian context. Understanding these patterns contributes to frameworks addressing dangerous speech and accountability mechanisms in conflict settings Saslow (2016); Timmermann (Year?).

The complexity of this issue stems from intersecting historical narratives, social trauma, and institutional constraints. Historical memory, including Holocaust remembrance, informs contemporary political discourse Moses (2021); Segal (2024). These narratives interact with international legal frameworks that regulate speech during conflict Jansen (2014). The tension between security imperatives and human rights protections presents analytical challenges for examining political rhetoric in this context.

We employ a mixed-methods approach to analyze a curated database of public statements. Quantitative analysis examines the frequency and co-occurrence of rhetorical themes, while qualitative discourse analysis identifies specific linguistic strategies. This methodology enables interpretation of how language frames civilian protection and legitimizes violence Weston (2024). The approach acknowledges limitations in translation fidelity and curation dependence while providing systematic examination of rhetorical patterns.

The study addresses three research questions. First, how is authority performed through wartime political speech? Second, what rhetorical patterns build or erode trust in relation to international humanitarian law frameworks? Third, how do institutional and cultural frames shape the reception of this discourse? These questions guide the examination of linguistic constructions in public statements by decision-makers.

The study makes several contributions:

- Documentation of rhetorical patterns in political speech during the 2023 Gaza conflict
- Analysis of how linguistic strategies normalize exceptional measures affecting civilian populations
- Methodological approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis of dangerous speech
- Implications for early-warning systems monitoring conflict escalation

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews related work on genocidal speech and discourse analysis. Section 3 provides background on the conflict context and theoretical frameworks. Section 4 details the mixed-methods approach. Section 5 presents quantitative and qualitative findings. Section 6 interprets the results and addresses limitations. Section 7 summarizes contributions and suggests future research directions.

The findings have implications for education, humanitarian policy, and cross-cultural understanding. They can inform media literacy programs that critically examine political rhetoric during conflict Maynard (2023). The analysis contributes to policy discussions about monitoring dangerous speech and strengthening accountability mechanisms LeVine (2025). Understanding these linguistic patterns may support efforts to prevent escalation and protect civilian populations in conflict settings.

2 RELATED WORK

This study builds on extensive scholarship examining dangerous speech and political rhetoric in conflict settings. Research on dangerous speech has established frameworks for identifying language that may incite violence against targeted groups Buerger & Benesch (2024). Seminal work by Benesch established key frameworks for identifying language that may incite violence against targeted groups Benesch (2014). Discourse analysis approaches have examined how political language constructs social reality and legitimizes action during armed conflicts Fairclough (1995); Weston (2024); Burnett (2021). Linguistic patterns in political rhetoric have been analyzed across various conflict contexts, revealing how language can normalize violence and erode civilian protections Saslow (2016). Studies of genocidal speech have documented specific rhetorical strategies that precede mass violence, including dehumanization, collective punishment justifications, and existential threat framing Landry (2022). The current analysis extends this scholarship by examining linguistic patterns in the specific context of Israeli political rhetoric during the 2023 Gaza conflict, employing mixed-methods to document both quantitative patterns and qualitative linguistic features.

3 BACKGROUND

This study is situated within scholarship examining political rhetoric during armed conflict, with particular attention to the Palestinian context. The analysis draws on frameworks that investigate how language constructs social reality and legitimizes political action. Research on dangerous speech provides a foundation for understanding how rhetoric can normalize violence against civilian populations Saslow (2016); Timmermann (Year?).

The interpretive orientation is informed by discourse analysis approaches that examine how language functions in social and political contexts. Speech act theory contributes to understanding how utterances perform actions beyond mere description, particularly in settings of conflict and violence Weston (2024). This perspective helps analyze how political statements can constitute acts of authorization for military measures affecting civilian populations.

Historical memory shapes contemporary political discourse in conflict settings. The transmission of traumatic historical events informs present-day rhetorical patterns and justifications for security measures Moses (2021); Segal (2024). This includes how references to past genocide are mobilized in current conflict rhetoric, creating complex intersections between historical trauma and present-day violence.

International legal frameworks establish parameters for speech during armed conflict. Provisions against incitement to genocide and hate speech represent attempts to regulate language that may lead to mass violence Jansen (2014). These frameworks interact with principles of free expression while seeking to prevent harm to civilian populations in conflict zones.

Research on dehumanization examines psychological and social processes that enable violence against targeted groups Landry (2022). These processes often manifest in political rhetoric through linguistic patterns that deny the humanity of civilian populations. Understanding these mechanisms is crucial for analyzing how speech can erode protections for non-combatants during armed conflict.

The societal context involves asymmetrical power relations between state actors and civilian populations in occupied territories. Institutional settings include government structures, military organizations, and international bodies that shape how political speech is produced and received. This context influences both the production of official statements and their interpretation by different audiences.

The analysis of political rhetoric in this context has implications for early warning systems and accountability mechanisms LeVine (2025). Understanding linguistic patterns that precede or accompany violence against civilians can contribute to frameworks for monitoring dangerous speech in conflict settings. This research builds on existing scholarship while addressing specific gaps in understanding rhetorical patterns in the Palestinian context.

4 METHOD

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative discourse analysis to examine political rhetoric. The approach systematically investigates both the prevalence of rhetorical themes and their linguistic characteristics in public statements by senior Israeli officials Weston (2024); González-Recio et al. (2025). This design addresses the complexity of political speech during armed conflict through complementary analytical perspectives Torregrosa et al. (2022).

4.2 DATA SOURCE AND SAMPLING

The analysis uses a curated database titled “Database of Israeli Incitement to Genocide – Decision Makers” compiled by Law for Palestine and dated January 4, 2024. The database contains twenty-two entries representing public statements by four senior Israeli officials: Yoav Gallant, Benjamin Netanyahu, Isaac Herzog, and Benny Gantz from October to December 2023. Each entry includes speaker identification, statement date, verbatim quotation, and pre-assigned topical tags. The database acknowledges potential limitations in translation fidelity from Hebrew originals.

4.3 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection involved systematic extraction of all entries from the compiled database. Each entry was documented with complete metadata including speaker, date, verbatim text, and assigned topical tags. The topical tags applied by the database compilers include collective punishment, civilian harm, genocidal intent, dehumanization, forced displacement, and destruction. The database includes an editorial disclaimer noting that translations may not be exact and that legal adjudication of genocide claims remains the domain of competent courts.

4.4 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Quantitative analysis examined frequency distributions of topical tags across the dataset and by individual speakers. Frequency counts identified prevalent rhetorical themes, while cross-tabulation analysis examined relationships between speakers and specific rhetorical patterns. The analysis documented co-occurrence patterns where multiple tags were applied to individual statements. This approach provided systematic documentation of rhetorical theme prevalence.

4.5 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Qualitative analysis employed discourse analysis techniques to examine linguistic and rhetorical features of the statements. Close reading of representative quotations identified specific rhetorical strategies and speech acts Weston (2024). The analysis focused on performative declarations, metaphorical constructions, binary framing devices, and justificatory patterns. Each statement was

examined for its pragmatic function in constructing authority and normalizing measures affecting civilian populations.

4.6 ANALYTICAL INTEGRATION

Methodological triangulation integrated quantitative frequency counts with qualitative discourse analysis to enhance analytical credibility. This involved comparing numerical patterns of rhetorical theme prevalence with detailed linguistic analysis of specific statements. The integration identified convergent findings where quantitative patterns aligned with qualitative evidence of rhetorical strategies, addressing potential limitations in database curation through multiple analytical perspectives.

4.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Several procedures ensured analytical trustworthiness. Methodological triangulation combined quantitative and qualitative approaches for complementary insights. Analytical transparency was maintained through systematic documentation of coding decisions and procedures. The study acknowledges dependence on the original database compilation and tagging, noting that independent re-coding could provide additional perspectives. Translation limitations were explicitly recognized as constraints on analytical precision.

4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research involved secondary analysis of publicly available statements by government officials, consistent with standard practices for discourse analysis. The database compilers provided appropriate disclaimers regarding translation accuracy and legal adjudication. No personal identifiers beyond public officials were involved. Quotations were used for scholarly criticism and commentary in accordance with academic fair use principles, maintaining focus on linguistic patterns rather than individual characteristics.

5 RESULTS

This section presents findings from the mixed-methods analysis of political rhetoric, employing systematic approaches to discourse analysis that combine quantitative and qualitative perspectives González-Recio et al. (2025).

The quantitative analysis revealed distinct patterns in the frequency and distribution of rhetorical themes across the twenty-two statements. Collective punishment appeared most frequently, occurring in fourteen entries, followed by civilian harm and genocidal intent, each appearing in twelve entries. Dehumanization was present in six statements, while forced displacement and destruction appeared less frequently, in two and one entries respectively. These frequencies demonstrate the prevalence of themes that normalize exceptional measures affecting civilian populations.

Cross-tabulation analysis by speaker revealed variations in rhetorical emphasis. Yoav Gallant's nine statements emphasized civilian harm and collective punishment, each appearing six times. Benjamin Netanyahu's nine statements showed high frequency of genocidal intent and civilian harm. Isaac Herzog's three statements consistently featured collective punishment, while Benny Gantz's single statement included civilian harm, collective punishment, and genocidal intent. These patterns indicate both shared rhetorical strategies and speaker-specific emphases across the political leadership cohort.

Qualitative analysis identified specific linguistic strategies that construct authority and normalize civilian harm. Performative declarations such as "I have removed all restraints" and "complete siege" function as speech acts establishing operational authority through claims of unlimited force. Metaphysical binaries including "people of the light versus people of darkness" and scriptural invocations referencing "Amalek" create civilizational and religious framing that sacralizes violence. Totalizing claims such as "There are no innocent civilians in Gaza" remove distinctions between combatants and non-combatants, functioning as justificatory mechanisms for undifferentiated harm.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings reveals systematic co-occurrence patterns. Statements tagged with multiple themes, particularly the combination of collective punishment, civilian harm, and genocidal intent, demonstrate how rhetorical strategies interconnect to normalize

exceptional measures. These patterns show how political rhetoric projects moral certainty and strategic inevitability while constructing authority through linguistic performance.

Analysis of temporal patterns across the October to December 2023 period shows consistent employment of these rhetorical strategies, with no significant diminution in frequency or intensity over the observed timeframe. The persistence of these patterns suggests their functional role in maintaining political authority and justifying ongoing military operations throughout the conflict period.

6 DISCUSSION

This study examined how wartime political speech by senior Israeli officials constructs authority and normalizes civilian harm in the Palestinian context. The analysis reveals systematic co-occurrence of rhetorical themes including collective punishment, civilian harm, genocidal intent, and dehumanization in public statements from October to December 2023. These findings address the research questions concerning authority performance in political speech, rhetorical patterns in relation to international humanitarian law frameworks, and the role of institutional and cultural frames in discourse reception.

The quantitative analysis documented frequent co-occurrence of rhetorical themes across multiple speakers. The prevalence of collective punishment, civilian harm, and genocidal intent labels across statements suggests these themes function as interconnected elements in political authority construction during armed conflict. Cross-tabulation analysis indicates that certain speakers employed specific combinations of rhetorical themes with varying frequency, revealing distinct patterns across the political leadership cohort.

Qualitative analysis identified linguistic strategies that perform authority and normalize exceptional measures. Performative declarations such as “I have removed all restraints” and “complete siege” function as speech acts that construct operational authority through claims of unlimited force. Metaphysical binaries including “people of the light versus people of darkness” and scriptural invocations referencing “Amalek” create civilizational and religious framing. Totalizing claims such as “There are no innocent civilians in Gaza” remove distinctions between combatants and non-combatants, functioning as justificatory mechanisms for undifferentiated harm.

The findings situate within scholarship on dangerous speech and international legal frameworks. The observed rhetorical patterns align with research on how language can normalize violence against civilian populations Saslow (2016); Timmermann (Year?). The systematic co-occurrence of dehumanization with genocidal intent and collective punishment supports literature on dangerous speech escalation in conflict settings. These patterns contribute to understanding how political discourse can erode protections afforded to civilian populations under international humanitarian law Jansen (2014).

The analysis reveals tensions in how rhetorical patterns build or erode trust across different audiences. For audiences oriented toward international humanitarian law and civilian protection frameworks, trust is likely eroded by dehumanizing generalizations and collective culpability claims. For domestic wartime audiences, the same patterns may build trust by signaling resolve and moral clarity. This dual function reflects the complex interplay between internal legitimacy-building and external accountability mechanisms in conflict settings.

Institutional and cultural frames shape the reception and interpretation of political discourse. Religious invocations and civilizational binaries position the conflict within existential registers that can legitimate exceptional measures. These framing devices influence domestic reception while complicating external trust-building efforts. Cultural and religious references in political speech function as mechanisms for constructing in-group solidarity and out-group differentiation during armed conflict.

The study acknowledges researcher positionality in interpreting political discourse. As secondary analysts of compiled statements, interpretation is shaped by methodological commitments to systematic analysis of linguistic patterns. The mixed-methods approach provides transparency while acknowledging dependence on database compilation and tagging. This positionality emphasizes documentation of observable linguistic features rather than attribution of intent or legal characterization.

The findings have implications for documentation practices in conflict settings. The systematic analysis of rhetorical patterns supports early-warning frameworks for monitoring dangerous speech LeVine (2025). Documentation of co-occurrence patterns across speakers and time periods can contribute to accountability mechanisms by providing evidence of rhetorical escalation. These implications extend to educational contexts where examples of political rhetoric can facilitate critical analysis of how language frames civilian protection during armed conflict.

The analysis contributes to understanding how historical memory informs contemporary political discourse. References to historical events and scriptural narratives demonstrate how collective memory functions as rhetorical resource in conflict justification Moses (2021); Segal (2024). These findings highlight the importance of contextual analysis in interpreting political speech during armed conflict, particularly regarding the mobilization of historical trauma in contemporary justification frameworks.

The study has limitations that shape interpretation of findings. Dependence on database compilation and pre-assigned topical tags means analysis operates within the conceptual framework established by the compilers. Translation fidelity represents another limitation, as nuances in original Hebrew statements may affect interpretation of rhetorical strategies. The temporal scope of October to December 2023 provides focused examination but limits analysis of longitudinal patterns in political rhetoric.

The findings suggest directions for future research. Extended temporal analysis could examine how rhetorical patterns evolve over longer conflict durations. Comparative analysis across different conflict settings could identify universal versus context-specific features of dangerous speech. Investigation of audience reception through empirical methods could provide evidence for how different communities interpret and respond to political rhetoric during armed conflict.

The analysis has implications for policy frameworks addressing dangerous speech in conflict settings. Documentation of rhetorical patterns can inform monitoring systems that track escalation in political discourse. Educational applications could use these findings to develop materials for critical media literacy regarding political rhetoric during armed conflict. These implications remain grounded in documented patterns observed through systematic analysis of public statements.

This discussion has interpreted findings through multiple theoretical lenses while maintaining focus on documented linguistic patterns. The analysis demonstrates how mixed-methods examination of political rhetoric can provide insights into authority construction and normalization of civilian harm during armed conflict. The findings contribute to scholarship on dangerous speech while suggesting practical applications for documentation, education, and policy frameworks in conflict settings.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This study examined linguistic patterns in political rhetoric by senior Israeli officials from October to December 2023. The mixed-methods analysis documented systematic co-occurrence of rhetorical themes including collective punishment, civilian harm, genocidal intent, and dehumanization across multiple speakers. Qualitative discourse analysis identified specific linguistic strategies that construct authority and normalize exceptional measures affecting civilian populations. These findings contribute to understanding how political speech can legitimize violence in conflict settings Saslow (2016); Timmermann (Year?).

The approach provides systematic documentation of rhetorical patterns that can inform frameworks for monitoring dangerous speech. The analysis contributes to understanding how language frames civilian protection during armed conflict. This methodology supports educational applications that examine political rhetoric and policy discussions about accountability mechanisms LeVine (2025). The mixed-methods design demonstrates how analysis of linguistic patterns can inform early-warning systems in conflict settings.

Future research could extend this analysis through comparative studies across different conflict contexts to identify universal versus context-specific features of dangerous speech. Longitudinal examination of rhetorical patterns could track escalation dynamics over extended time periods. Investigation of audience reception through empirical methods could provide evidence for how different communities interpret and respond to political rhetoric during armed conflict. Research

could also explore connections between linguistic patterns and humanitarian outcomes in conflict response frameworks.

This study demonstrates the value of mixed-methods approaches for analyzing political rhetoric in conflict settings. The findings contribute to scholarship on dangerous speech while providing practical applications for documentation, education, and policy frameworks. Future work should address limitations in database curation and translation fidelity while expanding the temporal and comparative scope of analysis to enhance understanding of how language functions in armed conflict.

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